

# Guard at plant is fired

## Firm cites incident at chemical facility

BY J. LYNN LUNSFORD  
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A security guard at a North Side chemical plant suspected of containing buried hazardous waste was fired yesterday after she allowed a Fort Worth city employee inside the abandoned compound to read the water meter.

Kathleen Dunn, 20, said she was terminated from her \$4.10-an-hour job at the old American Cyanamid chemical plant for "doing something that I had done a dozen times before with no problems."

"My employer told me I had committed an infraction of the rules," Dunn said. "All I did was let the man in Thursday to read the meter like I had done once a month since I had been there."

Said Ryan Krause, the security firm's operations manager: "She was supposed to notify a local contact that the water department was there and then get prior clearance. She didn't do that, so she violated our policy."

Dunn had been employed by the Wackenhut Corp. of Arlington for a year as a security guard.

The plant, which is located less than a mile from downtown Fort Worth and which closed in 1983, is still maintained by American Cyanamid Co. American Cyanamid officials said yesterday that the Arlington security firm for which Dunn worked is supposed to watch the 34-acre complex of buildings and storage tanks.

Years-old allegations that the company buried tons of chemical waste at the site during a period after World War II resurfaced recently, prompting the Texas Department of Highways and Public Transportation to plan the proposed Southwest Freeway around the site — a move that has concerned city leaders and preservationists.

Dunn said yesterday that recent public attention focused on the chemical plant has caused the security firm to tighten its regulations and that may be partially responsible for her dismissal.

"They didn't want reporters in there taking samples and snooping around," Dunn said.

But she said she also believes she may have been fired for asking questions about the chemicals.

"I voiced a fear about being exposed to whatever was out there," she said. "I think they decided it was best to get me out of the way."

Officials at Wackenhut said Dunn's firing had nothing to do with getting her out of the way.

Dunn said she has no desire to regain her job in light of questions about buried chemicals.

She said that during the last week, a  
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tractor owned by American Cyanamid has been busy near the spot where former employees say much of the waste is buried.

American Cyanamid officials said yesterday that they were unaware of any unusual activity at the plant.

"We have a groundskeeper who routinely cleans out the storm drains out there with a front-end loader," said Ray Merrell, manager of environmental projects for the chemical company in New Jersey. "That might be what she is talking about."

Dunn said that during the year she spent at the plant, she noticed green and orange water standing in some of the plant's evaporation ponds. Once a month, she said, an American Cyanamid employee pumped the water into a drain that leads to the Trinity River nearby.

Merrell said that water is pumped from the storage ponds into the river, but he said it is only storm runoff trapped in low spots. He said no hazardous chemicals are in the water.

But soil tests conducted by the Fort Worth/Tarrant County Health Department around two drainage ditches leading to the river indicate that some chemicals have washed from the surface of the plant site into the water.

According to the studies, conducted early this year, small amounts of copper, lead, nickel, cadmium, chromium and vanadium were found near the plant. Health department officials said, however, that all were within tolerable limits for drinking water.

But what is or isn't buried in the pits around the site is what concerns city and state officials.

"We know that American Cyanamid disposed of chemical waste on the site," said Rick Hay, assistant Fort Worth city manager. "What we need to find out is if there are toxic substances out there."

Author Berkley, who was employed at the plant for nearly 30 years, said this week that he buried thousands of barrels of chemicals at the plant under orders from company officials.

"There was one day that I buried 200 drums of vanadium catalyst that was returned to us," Berkley said. "We just dug a hole and buried it."

The company manufactured the catalyst to remove impurities from crude oil and fuel.

In 1977, federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration officials inspected the plant and found that raw mercury — one of the deadliest known chemicals — was spilled on work-

benches and floors in the plant's laboratory.

The agency also found that workers were not given proper respirators to protect their lungs from chemical dust inside the plant.

Berkley is one of at least five of the plant's former employees who has sued the company, claiming that maladies including chronic lung disease, heart attacks and damage to the brain and central nervous system were caused by prolonged exposure to the chemicals. Berkley's suit is pending in federal court.

"You name it, we buried it out there," Berkley said. "Some of that stuff was so bad that I would get

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— Kathleen Dunn  
former security guard

nauseated, start coughing and then the next thing you know, I was spitting up blood."

Berkley said he remembers seeing at least one 60-pound cylinder of deadly hydrogen cyanide gas in a burial pit at the south end of the plant, near a wooded area.

"I would certainly be concerned that cylinder would be deteriorated by now," Berkley said.

American Cyanamid's Merrell said hydrogen cyanide was stored at the Fort Worth plant between 1950 and the late 1960s. He said the gas was used to fumigate grain silos.

"As far as I know, all of the cylinders were recalled, but it is possible there is a cylinder buried out there," Merrell said. "I would certainly be surprised, though."

Merrell said his company is willing to work with city officials to conduct soil tests.

"Since there is so much community concern, American Cyanamid will respond in a timely fashion," Merrell said.

City officials say the sooner, the better.

"Regardless of whether the highway ever goes through there, we need to find out if we have a problem," Hay said. "If that means carefully digging or drilling in grids around the whole plant, then that's what needs to be done."

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